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meanings if spoken in different tones. For example, the syllable *Meh* may mean 'eye', 'sand', 'tail', 'mole' (on the body), or 'tooth', according to the tone in which it is uttered.

Originally the Karens had a mass of unwritten bardic literature, poems and stories handed down orally and recited around the fireplaces, from generation to generation. Some of these were epic poems which related the history of their race, and others folk stories which they told for amusement and which served to keep alive the traditions of their tribes. Many of these stories were much like the Negro folk tales told in America under the title of "Uncle Remus Stories", or like Grimms' Fairy Tales in Europe. In these Karen folk stories the rabbit figures as the wily one as it does in the Negro tales, and as the fox appears in the European stories.

Their epic poems have remarkable accounts of the creation of the world by *Ywa*, who closely resembles the God of the Hebrew Scriptures. They tell of the origin of the human race and the expulsion from a garden, which is similar to the story of Paradise Lost. The poems are in five stress lines and are in couplet form like Hebrew poetry. In their earlier days there use to be rhyming contests or "capping rhymes" as an important part of gatherings such as wedding and funeral feasts. At present they only survive among the most primitive villages away from outside influences.

There are many dialects of the Karen language—probably about twenty of them. They fall into six groups: the Sgaw, Pwo, Bwè, Padaung, Karenni and Zayein. The Sgaw and Pwo are the two largest groups. These are the two which have been used in education and in

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197 stand, Pwo because of the nasal effect on the pro-
194 nunciation.

197 The Bwè dialects, spoken near Toungoo in the hills
177 about Thandaung, have many nasal sounds and somewhat resemble the Pwo. Other dialects in the mountains differ quite widely from each other but the people in the hills speak several of these dialects for there is now much more intermingling than there was formerly when feuds kept the people apart and made it possible for different dialects to grow up even within a few miles of each other.

193 The grammar of the various dialects is not difficult. The sentence is formed after the same model as the English, with subject, verb, and object. The written and spoken language are very similar and direct. There are honorifics as in Burmese. There is no sex designation in the names of individuals, and so the Karens use *Saw* for all men and *Naw* for all women or girls.

212 When Westerners first came into contact with them
177 the Karens had no written language. But so urgent was
● 773 the demand of those who accepted the missionaries as
797 fulfilling the prophesies uttered by their old poets that some day they would be found by the "Younger White Brother" who would come across the sea in great ships "with white wings" and bring them the Book which their ancestors were supposed to have neglected and lost, that Dr. Wade, in about 1830, reduced the language of the Sgaw dialect to writing. He used the Burmese alphabet, for at that time any Karen who knew anything about reading could read in the Burmese language of the monastery. It was not then foreseen that English and the Roman letter would occupy such an important place in world affairs as they now enjoy.

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586 291 178 fully blended together, but the weaving of these skirts was almost a lost art at the time of the invasion.

291 855 562 Little children were wrapped in blankets or in garments that were cast off by their elders. When romping boys began to run around they did not bother with clothes until they were five or six, or even older. Little girls usually began to wrap a small *longyi* about their waists at three or four. Elders often went about with scant loin cloths, but very seldom did they appear without any clothing.

291 177 With the rise of national self-consciousness, the Karens tried an adaptation of their national dress and, finding the old smock ill-adapted to modern conditions, they invented a jacket cut after the style of the ordinary European lounge jacket made of the native cloth and embroidered with some of the designs of the original smocks. There were many patterns of these and they became very popular among the younger men in the cities and towns and among older boys in schools. They were a sort of blazer such as is worn in schools in Europe or [562] America. A few Karens adopted the European style of men's dress, but few women in the cities wore anything except the usual Burmese costume.

291 184 562 773 Among the Bwès and Pakus, another tribe near Toungoo, the women all wore skirts of an identical pattern. This had a black ground with two or three narrow horizontal stripes at about the height of the knees. But among the Sgaws there was a large number of patterns. The most common was a conventional design of horizontal stripes of various shades of red and in the middle "python skin" in clouded pattern. This commemorates the old myth of the woman who was stolen by the

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legendary white python and who was released only by the sacrifice of her husband. On her release she wove the pattern of the python's skin into her skirt thus offering him the greatest insult that she knew. (This incident is related in the story of "Ku Law Lay and Naw Mu Eh".)

Bathing is an important item of comfort in a hot country, being not so much for cleanliness as for coolness. In the hills where the water is icy cold as it comes from the mountain springs, and where often the village is located far above the water streams, bathing is [illegible] indulged in to any g[illegible]t extent. Nor do Karen[illegible] mind dirty clothes, for they know that much washing [illegible] them out, as they have to depend upon rubbing and pounding rather than upon soap. In the seclusion of the mountain forests they often play about in the water without clothes. On the plains, where bathing is more common either in the open rivers or at the village well, they

[illegible] male costume

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CHAPTER II

THE ORIGIN OF THE KAREN

The traditions of the Karen clearly indicate that they have not always lived in their present home. The most striking story is that of "Htaw Meh Pa," the mythical founder of the Karen race, who lived with his numerous family in some unknown land to the North, where their fields were ravaged by a great boar. The patriarch went out and killed the boar; but when the sons went to bring in the carcass, they could find only one tusk which had been broken off in the fray. The old man made a comb out of this, which surprised them all by its power of conveying eternal youth to all who used it. Soon their country became overpopulated, and they set out to seek a new and better land. They traveled together till they came to a river called in Karen "Hti Seh Meh Ywa." Here the old man became impatient at the long time it took the members of the family to cook shellfish and went on ahead, promising to blaze his path that they might follow him through the jungle. After a while the Chinese came along and told them how to open the shells to get out the meat; and then, having eaten, they followed the old man, only to find that the plantain stalks he had cut off had shot up so high that it seemed impossible to overtake him. They, therefore, settled down in the vicinity. The patriarch went on, taking with him the magic comb which has never been discovered to this day.

While this tradition is not confined to the Karen,[1] it has a bearing, I believe, on their origin. A great deal has been written about the "Hti Seh Meh Ywa" or, as Dr. Mason called it, the "River of Running Sand,"[2] which is, as he thinks, the Gobi Desert. This opinion of Dr. Mason is derived from Fa Hien's description of his travels across that desert. However, the Karen name of the river means not only "flowing sand," but also a "river of

[1] This tradition is found among the Lahu and also, according to Tira Ba Tu, among the Chin in the northwest of Burma.

MacMahon, in *The Karens of the Golden Chersonese*, p. 104, refers to a different version of this story, in which the Chinese go ahead instead of "Htaw Meh Pa," and on p. 104 MacMahon says he found traditions indicating that the Karen formed part of a Chinese expedition into Burma and that they were left behind because of their sluggish movements. These all point to early relations with the Chinese.

[2] Mason, *British Burma*, p. 881.

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291 177 In the matter of adopting foreign dress the women are more conservative than the men. Long after every man in a village has taken on the Burmese costume, the women continue to wear their characteristic black smock over their Burmese jacket and "longyi" (skirt).

291 The Sgaw and Pwo women, after arriving at the age of puberty, wear a smock ("hse") and a shirt ("ni"). Little girls wear a single "hse," falling from their neck to their ankles, at least when it is new. In some villages they wear a white "hse," without any ornament or color, but in other places they wear a black garment ornamented with colored yarns at the neck and around the armholes. In some localities the maidens wear the long white "hse," reaching to the ankles, until they are married; but it is more common for them to put on the skirt and wear a shorter "hse" at about the time they arrive at maturity.

291 ●773 286 The women's dress varies from one tribe to another, and in some instances each village has its particular weave. There is considerable general similarity of the Karen designs to those in the Malay countries, in Borneo, and in the Philippines; but the particular Karen design, among the Sgaw women at least, is that supposed to be derived from the python. The story is that "Naw Mu E," one of the mythical characters of ancient times, was kidnapped by a fabulous White Python and carried off to his den. Later, her husband, hearing of her plight, came and rescued her by sacrificing himself at the mouth of the den, whereupon the woman was released and enabled to return to the upper earth again. Various versions of the story exist, one of which is that she was compelled by the python to weave patterns on its skin that still remain, but on being released showed her contempt for it by weaving skirts for herself of the same pattern, thus giving it the gravest insult she could inflict. This pattern soon became general among Karen women.

291 296 Other patterns, of which there are many, are called by various names, as seeds, little pagodas, cowries, etc. Especially beautiful is the pattern or weave worn by the Mopgha women, which consists of a variety of figures in magenta, yellow, and green on a black ground. I have been told that the weaving of the designs for these [178] skirts has become a lost art, none of the young women of the few villages of the Mopgha tribe having learned to weave these garments. The Bwe women usually wear a black "ni" or skirt with

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301 Among some of the Karen tribes to the east brass or other
304 wire rings are worn on the legs, either from the ankles up over the calves, or from the knees up the thighs, or with only one or two rings at intervals on the legs. The arms are also more or less laden with brass circlets, as may be seen from Scott's description.[4]

Earrings are worn by both Karen men and women, but are usually in the form of plugs instead of rings. The silver ear plug of the Sgaw resembles a spool with one end flaring out more widely than the other. The larger end may be nearly two inches in diameter at the rim, tapering down to a little less than an inch

Women's Earrings, Half Size

in diameter where it joins the cylindrical part which fits the hole in the ear-lobe. The men wear plugs that have the ends covered over with a plate of silver, while the plugs worn by the women are left open. Through these openings leaves or flowers are often inserted. Sometimes plugs made of a rolled strip of palm leaf fill the holes in the ear-lobes, these holes being rarely more than an inch in diameter. When the holes for the ear plugs are in process of being enlarged, the little rolls of palm leaf are as tightly wrapped and as large as possible when inserted. They then tend to loosen, and in so doing stretch the lobe. Sections of a stem of bamboo are sometimes worn by hill people in the lobes of their ears or, in the absence of anything else, a buttonaire of orchids or other flowers found in the jungle. More than once have I seen orchids that would bring fancy prices in a Western city fringing the dirty face of some half-naked urchin.

301 Karen men not uncommonly wear beads or strings about their
[773] necks, besides other ornaments on their arms and legs. But perhaps the ornament peculiar to them consists of the boar's tusk comb, such as their ancestor, "Htaw Meh Pa," made after he had killed the mythical boar. This is worn behind the ear, hanging down as a sort of earring. The comb, which is not unlike the

[4] J. G. Scott, *Burma. A Handbook*, pp. 121, ff.

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walk without stopping, is a stage, *t' taw leh;* a half-day's journey, *t' n.ā htu leh*; a day's journey, *t' ni leh*, and so on. The Karen may on occasion speak of a month's or a year's journey to very distant places. Another method of designating distances by intervals of time during which physical effort is required is to specify the number of betel chews or quids that would be consumed during the trip. For instance, a Karen is apt to inform one that a certain village is three or four betel chews distant. As it requires from fifteen to twenty minutes to dispose of a quid of betel, the village in question may be estimated as being three or four miles away.

The Karen's Knowledge of Astronomy

It often happens that the Karen find their way through the jungle at night by means of the stars. The more brilliant constellations, called *hsa t' so*, are well known and have their particular names. Of these, the Great Bear *(Hsa k' htaw*, literally the Elephant) and the Southern Cross *(Meh la ka)* are referred to the most frequently, because they signify north and south, respectively. These two constellations were supposed, according to an old legend, to have been brothers, being thought to resemble each other in appearance; but on account of a quarrel they separated and went to the opposite ends of the heavens. Orion is known by the name of the Stealthily Shooting Stars *(Hsa kwa hka)*. A legend relating to the three stars of Orion's belt, which are named *Hsa yo ma* (stars that seized wives), recounts that these stars kidnapped the daughters of the Pleiades, which are regarded as the great ones of the heavens. Later the three culprits were caught and reduced to the degraded position of servants to their parents-in-law. The Archer —Sagittarius of the ancients—is called the Bow-head Star *(Hsa hkli hko*, literally, the head of the bow where it is joined to the barrel of the crossbow). The Pleiades are named *Hsa deu mū*, a term signifying a collection of people closely related to one another; while three stars just east of the Pleiades, which look as though they had broken away from the original group, are called *Deu mū law hpa* (those separated from the company). Three stars south of the Pleiades, which form a triangle, bear the name of the Loom *(Hsa hta hko)*, because the geometrical figure indicated by their positions suggests that enclosed by the floor, which forms the base; the wall, the vertical side; and the inclined warp, the hypothenuse, of the loom in the living-room of a Karen home. It ought to

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be added that the rising of the morning star, *Hsa tu ghaw*, marks the time for the Karen to get up in the morning; while the appearance of the evening star, *Hsa tu ha*, informs him that the end of the day's work has come and with it the time for going home.

The Karen take note of shooting stars, which they speak of sometimes as *Hsa yu* or flying stars and sometimes as *Hsa hpo tha*, youthful stars. Catching sight of them, people say that they are going to visit the maidens. They give to comets the obvious name of tailed stars, *Hsa meh htaw*, and are not different from other superstitious races in believing that their coming brings calamity. The planets have impressed them as "wandering stars," while they leave the fixed stars without names, except the Pole Star, which they call the Mouse, and a star near the moon, which they describe as the star that draws the moon, *Hsa mo la*. The Milky Way reminds the Karen of their flowering fields of paddy and receives the poetic name of the paddy flower stars, *Hsa bü hpaw*.

Like the Chinese and other Oriental peoples, the Karen attribute the eclipse of the sun or moon to some monster that devours the luminary. The Karen, however, do not discover this monster in the dragon, but believe that dogs do the devouring. According to the legend, a certain personage, who possessed the elixir of life, had four dogs. On one occasion when he was absent from home, the moon descended to earth and stole his wondrous cordial. On his return, finding the elixir had vanished, he constructed a ladder of rice-straw and mounted aloft with his dogs. But just as he was stepping upon the moon his ladder broke, causing him and one of his faithful beasts to fall to earth and lose their lives. The other three dogs were so fortunate as to find secure footing on the firmament. Now and again they become enraged at the recollection of the untimely fate of their master, attack and swallow the moon, and thereby produce the eclipse. One of these faithful dogs is black, and for some unknown reason is unable to swallow the moon entire and so causes only a partial eclipse; but the yellow one devours it completely, and it can be seen shining through his hide, which accounts for the color of the luminary during a total eclipse. On escaping through the animal's bowels, the moon regains its former brightness.[4]

[4] See Chapter XXVIII on Tabu, p. 289.

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where they settled.[6] This is the view of the origin of the drums held by Heger and others.

Certain Karen traditions associate the drums with "Pü Maw Taw," one of the mythical characters of ancient times. This man was at work in his field and, seeing a flock of monkeys emerge from the forest, feigned death. Thereupon, the monkeys sent several of their number back to bring their drums for the proper performance of the funeral rites. Of the three brought, one was silver, one, gold, and the third, white in appearance. The last one fell into a pool of water and was lost. "Pü Maw Taw" suddenly interrupted the funeral ceremonies and the monkeys ran away, leaving the other two drums in the field. The old man took them home and they at once became the most sacred possession of the people, being consecrated every year with very great ceremony, until at last the Pwo Karen grew tired of making their annual journey for this purpose and carried them off. They were named "Gaw Kwa Htu" and "Gaw Kwa Se" [7] and are still believed to have been deposited in a cave near Donyan in Thaton district. Each drum had two sticks and a striker, all made of bronze. The smaller stick, which produced a rolling sound, was in the form of a centipede. The striker had a quilted surface, in appearance like the scales of a cobra. Unfortunately these drum implements had been left behind with the Sgaw, of Loo Thaw Ko village in the Papun district. Almost every year the Sgaw came down and demanded that the drums be given back to them, but without success. Gaw Le Bay and Gaw Ser Paw were the two Pwo Karens who committed the sacrilege of stealing away the drums, being punished for it with sore eyes, from which their descendants in Donyin suffer even unto this day.

All the elders believe that the bronze drums connect the Karen people with a remote past. But few of these objects that are still in existence can be traced back more than a century or two. Nevertheless, I have heard of some that are reputed to be much older, especially one in a Mopgha village, near Toungoo, which is said to date back "nearly a thousand years." This drum has a name, and innumerable offerings have been made to it year after year.

It was formerly thought that the Red Karen were the only tribe who possessed drums, but it now appears that these instruments were known among all the tribes. In many places, however, they are no longer used. It is in the remoter hill regions, where

[6] See Chapter I, pp. 9, 12.
[7] "Gaw" is the prefix used for drums, as "maw" is for men.

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CHAPTER XX

FUNERAL CUSTOMS

753 When a Karen is ill, his sickness is thought to be due to some action of the malevolent spirits of the unseen world or to the wandering of his "k'la" (life principle or psyche). His malady may be due to an accident, an attack of indigestion after eating too many green mangoes, or an infection of some sort; but, according to his belief, some invisible spirit has been offended by a slight and is the real cause of his disorder.[1]

[801] 774 761 782 The seven-fold "k'la," which presides over the life of every person from the time of his birth, will, the Karen believes, determine the time and manner of that person's death. Notwithstanding the fact that one or another of the many causes of death will sometime effect the dissolution of every member of the race, the Karen makes offerings to delay as long as possible the inevitable end. Most propitiatory feasts require the presence of every immediate member of the family, in order to render the feasts acceptable to the spirits. If the sick person seems to be sinking, his relatives will all remain and try to be at hand when he breathes his last.

764 773 Karen funerals are by no means solemn occasions. On the contrary, they afford the greatest opportunity for the people to enjoy themselves. I have heard it said that when a considerable time has elapsed since a death in a particular region, the young people long for someone to die, so that they may have a jolly time. The question has often been raised why the Karen, who are not without family affection, conduct themselves in what to Occidentals is a very unseemly manner at the funerals of their dearly beloved ones. Possibly some light is thrown on this question by the story of the fabulous White Python. According to this story, after the python had been compelled to release "Naw Mū E," it took vengeance by killing men in great numbers by discharging its venom on their footprints. It took pleasure in hearing of the suffering and sorrow it was causing the human race and, therefore, redoubled its efforts. The peo-

[1] See Chapter XXIII, pp. 289-345, and Chapter XXIV, pp. 349-354, 357.

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764 773 ple, fearing lest they should become extinct, sought to overcome the python by guile. They determined to try the plan of deceiving the serpent and its menials by ostentatious feasting and festivity when a person died through its malevolence, instead of mourning over the victim. This subterfuge proved to be successful, for the servants of the python reported to their master that the people were no longer succumbing to its poison, but were rejoicing over their newly won immunity. At this the enraged serpent discharged all of its venom and thereby lost the power it had formerly possessed of causing the death of human beings.

761 This tale reveals the Karen's profound fear of the mysterious causes of death. He is unacquainted with the modern sciences of physiology, pathology, hygiene, etc. Some unknown power removes his parents or his children, and he strives to fortify himself against it. The White Python of the tale typifies the evil spirits, who are continually lying in wait for him and the members of his family. His object seems to be to counteract their baneful influence, even in the hour of its manifestation, by concealing his sorrow and indulging in ceremonial feasting and forced hilarity. Such appears to be the significance of the story of "Naw Mü E" and the fabulous White Python.

764 The people have their own explanations of their mode of conducting funerals. One is that certain of their sports assist the spirit of the departed to avoid the pitfalls in his path as he journeys from this world to his proper place in the next. They are employing the appropriate means "to make his way cool," as they express it. Being inhabitants of a tropical region, the word "cool" is the Karen's synonym for comfortable and pleasant. Another explanation given by the Karen for his method of conducting funerals is that he aims to cheer the hearts of those who are bereaved. Being without a solace to overcome the sting of death, the mourners are the more ready to fill their minds with such absorbing sights and sounds as will expel the sad remembrance of their loss. The reaction comes later, but the Karen's habit of living in the present has enabled him to reduce that to a minimum.

When a person dies, the relatives, if not all present, are immediately called by sounding the big bronze drum or "klo a' ko" (the hot drum or drum of discomfort). The pounding of this drum communicates to everyone within hearing the news that a death has taken place, just as the tolling of a church bell in the early days of New England carried the tidings of death to the villagers. For a

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ing a period of six months to the exclusion of the other; they assigned a lord ("k' sa") to every mountain and river, and they invested every utensil and object about the house and the animals out-of-doors with separate ghosts ("k'las"). Some of these imaginary beings are beneficent, such as the "Mū xa" or celestial spirits that preside over births; but most of them are malevolent and have to be appeased by continual offerings, sacrifices, and tabus. To keep on good terms with these innumerable spirits consumes a large part of the time and thought of the Karen.[4]

The third conception in the religious traditions of the people is embodied in the "Y'wa" legend, which tells of the placing of the first parents in the garden by "Y'wa," the Creator; their temptation to eat of the forbidden fruit by a serpent or dragon, etc. This story so closely resembles that of the ancient Hebrews, as also certain western Asiatic traditions, that one finds it difficult not to believe that all these traditions somehow had a common origin. Were the "Y'wa" legend marked by distinctive features, we might regard it as one exhibiting only a general resemblance to other traditions extant in other parts of the world, but its parallelism with the account in Genesis precludes this view of the case.[5]

At any rate, the "Y'wa" legend has exercised a strong influence upon the Karen people. To be sure, it did not supplant the ancient animism of the tribes any more than Buddhism has displaced spirit worship among the Burmese. Nevertheless, it was accompanied by the prophesy of the return of the white brother with the Lost Book, which inspired the Karen with the hope of a better future and furnished an admirable foundation on which Christian teachers could build in promoting the development of the Karen nation which, during the last hundred years—the period not only of Christian missions but also of the British conquest and administration of Burma—has been truly remarkable.

The "Y'wa" Tradition

The contrast between the animistic and the "Y'wa" conception of the creation of the world is illustrated in the lines of the following "hta" or poem:

> "When first the earth was made,
> Who worked and built it?
> When it was first formed,
> Who was the creator?"

[4] See Chapter XXII on Supernatural and Mythical Beings, p. 223.
[5] See pp. 10-12.

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"When first the world was created,
The edolius and the termite toiled together.[6]
When the earth was first formed,
These two helped each other and made it."

The "Y'wa" conception appears in the last stanza, given below:

"When first the earth was formed,
It was God ('Y'wa') who formed it.
When first the world was fashioned,
It was God who fashioned it."

In some of the omitted parts of the poem we find the thought expressed that the edolius and the termite were co-workers with God in creating the world. It should, perhaps, be explained that [136] the termite is the white ant, which builds high mounds all over the country; while the *edolius paradiscus* is a black bird, a little smaller than a crow, with two long tail quills having tufts of feathers at the ends. Why this bird should have been given a part in the work of creation does not appear.

Characterization of "Y'wa" as the Eternal One is herewith given in two translations from an ancient poem, the first of these being by an unknown person of an earlier time and the other by Dr. Francis Mason.

"God is eternal, He alone [existed]
Before the world was made; His throne
Interminable ages stood,
And He, the everlasting God.
Two worlds may pass, and yet He lives.
Perfect in attributes divine,
Age after age His glories shine."[7]

The rendering by Dr. Mason is as follows:

"God is unchangeable, external;
He was in the beginning of the world.
God is endless and eternal;
He existed in the beginning of the world.
God is truly unchangeable and eternal;
He existed in ancient time, at the beginning of the world.
The life of God is endless;
A succession of worlds does not measure his existence.
God is perfect in every meritorious attribute,
And dies not in succession on succession of worlds."[8]

[6] Rev. T. Than Bya, D.D., *Karen Customs, Ceremonies, and Poetry*, p. 81. The Karen name for the edolius is "hto hkiu." Dr. Mason speaks of it as the Moulmein nightingale: *Burma*, p. 219.

[7] This version is printed in D. M. Smeaton's *The Loyal Karens of Burma*.

[8] Mason, *The Karen Apostle*, ed., p. 97.

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Besides being called eternal, God is described as "all powerful" and as "having the knowledge of all things." He created man and "woman from a rib of man," and he made the animals and placed them on the earth.

The power mentioned in the old poems as opposed to "Y'wa" and as having brought evil into the world is "Naw k' plaw." In later poems the name given to him is "Mü kaw li," which is a term of reproach used on account of his often being supposed to assume the female form, in order to accomplish his deceptions on the human race.[8]

He is said to have been a servant of "Y'wa" at first, but to have been cast out of his lord's presence for offering him a gross insult. The other servants of "Y'wa" have ever since cherished the desire to destroy "Mü kaw li," but have never accomplished their purpose. Hence, he continues to roam about, deceiving mankind and spreading death among them, until he shall finally be put out of the way by "Y'wa" himself. He is the direct author of evil and of the curse that has fallen upon the earth which, before his contemptible conduct, had produced rice with kernels as large as pumpkins. It was through his malicious instructions that the people learned to make sacrifices to the "Bgha" and other demons.

The Karen legends and poems give the story of the fall of man in their own picturesque language, which has been translated into English by Dr. D. C. Gilmore, who has brought together the several versions extant in various parts of the country. For the most part I shall paraphrase and condense Dr. Gilmore's translation; for the original narratives, whether in prose or verse, are full of repetitions, variations in insignificant details, and other peculiarities incident to tales that have been handed down by word of mouth.

The Lord "Y'wa," father of the human race, spoke to the first pair he had created: "My son and daughter both, your father will make an orchard for you, and in that orchard there will be seven kinds of trees bearing seven kinds of fruit. Of the seven kinds there

[8] The derivation of the names of this being are interesting. "Naw" is the usual feminine prefix of the names of all females, and "k' plaw" signifies quickly, in reference to the suddenness with which his power to tempt one was exercised. The later name, which has now come into universal use both among non-Christian and Christian Karens as the designation of the Devil, is composed of "mü," meaning woman; "kaw," signifying the state of or pertaining to, and "li," denoting the female *locus impudicus*. This combination constitutes a term of the utmost contempt and refers to the insult which Satan visited upon "Y'wa" when offerings were being brought to him. The Devil's offering was a flower on which he had misturated. His act was discovered and aroused the anger of the entire celestial company.

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is one that is not good to eat. Do not partake of it. If you eat of it, you will fall ill; you will grow old; you will die. Do not eat it. Now, whatever else I have made, I will give it all to you. Behold it and eat it. Once in seven days I will come and see you. Obey me in whatever I have commanded you. Keep my words. Do not forget me. Worship me every morning and evening."

By-and-by the Devil, in the form of a great serpent, came and engaged them in conversation, asking them what they were doing and what they had to eat. They replied that their father had provided them with more than sufficient food and escorted him to the orchard, where they pointed out the several varieties of the trees and told him the flavor of the fruit of six of the varieties. Concerning the taste of the seventh, they admitted their ignorance, inasmuch as they had been warned by their father not to eat of it. Thereupon, the Devil informed the pair that their father did not wish them well, that the fruit of the forbidden tree was the sweetest and richest of all and, moreover, would transform them into gods, enabling them to ascend to heaven, to fly, and to burrow under the ground at will. He declared that the Lord God was envious of them, while he, the Devil, loved them and was telling them the whole truth as they might easily prove by partaking of the forbidden fruit.

The man was not persuaded by the plausible words of Satan, maintained that they would comply with the orders of their father, and left the intruder. But his wife, "Naw I-u," listened to the Devil's seductive voice, was half-persuaded and sought assurance by inquiring whether she and her husband would really fly if they ate of this wonderful fruit. The Devil again insisted that he loved them dearly, and that he was trying to convince her of the truth. When she ate the fruit, the Devil laughed and told her to give some of it to her husband; otherwise, if she should die, she alone would perish, or if she should become like a goddess, she would be left without a companion. She did as directed and, after considerable persuasion, her husband also partook of the fruit, to the delight of Satan.

On the day following the eating of the forbidden fruit the Lord "Y'wa" came to see the disobedient pair and laid his curse upon them, declaring that they would grow old, sicken, and die; that their offspring would pass away at all ages, and that some of their descendants would have no more than half a family, that is,

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six children. Not only was the curse of "Y'wa" visited upon them, but also upon their first child, as was manifest by its falling sick. As "Y'wa" had forsaken them they appealed to the Devil, who replied that they must obey him to the end and promised to instruct them in the customs of his father and mother. Accordingly, he caught and killed a pig and examined its gall-bladder, explaining that if this organ were well rounded, the omen would be favorable; but if thin and flabby, there would be little hope for the recovery of the child. In case the child regained his health, they were to make a demon feast. Inasmuch as the little one did get well, they celebrated the feast according to instructions. Not long after another child was taken sick and, although they consulted the prescribed omen, there was no improvement in its condition. They, therefore, appealed again to the serpent, who told the father to catch a fowl which was to be used in calling back the spirit of the sick one. "Mü kaw li" placed the fowl, together with a bundle of chaff, a bundle of rice, and a bundle of potsherds, in a net, which he carried into the jungle, followed by the parents. There he plucked the feathers from the fowl and laid them, together with the three bundles, in the middle of the path. He then prayed: "Spirit, Spirit. The spirit has gone to hades. The spirit has gone to hell. Release the spirit." Next he cooked the fowl and tried its bones, to see whether they were soft or not. But he would not commit himself as to the favorableness or unfavorableness of the omen, telling the parents that they must watch and wait, and that meantime he would treat the case in every possible way. Nevertheless, the child died, and the Devil could give the bereaved ones no other consolation than that when the chicken bones were found in the future to be like those he had tested, they would know the omen to be unfavorable. He also taught them a charm to be used when there was sickness in the family, and, in connection with the charm, they were to wind seven threads.[10] Having wrought all this mischief and failed to furnish any certain relief from it, the Devil departed; while the man and his wife took up the task of teaching their offspring the ceremonies and charms in which he had instructed them.[11]

[10] See p. 221.

[11] The form of the tradition which is found among the Gelkho tribe is more explicit than the versions found elsewhere. The original ancestors of the human race are by them called "Ai-ra-bai" or "E ra bai," and "Mo ra mu" or "Moren mee". (Among the figures they are called, respectively, "Saw Tha nai" and "Naw E u"). From the first pair they count by name thirty generations to the time of "Pan dan man," when the people attempted to build a

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There can be no doubt but that the above legend of the fall of man [12] has been largely responsible for the readiness with which the Karen people have accepted Christianity. It led them to believe that they began their existence as a race under the care and protection of "Y'wa," which their ancestors soon forfeited by their disobedience in following the deceptive advice of "Mü kaw li." They believe that their present practices originated from an evil source and should be abandoned; but their veneration for their ancestors and the customs established by them, in addition to their fear of worse consequences should they depart from time-honored usage, makes it exceedingly difficult for them to give up the old ways. They acknowledge the goodness of "Y'wa" and their obligation to worship him; but they feel so hedged about by a multitude of demons who will bring calamities upon them and devour their souls that they placate these, while believing that "Y'wa" will not harm them even though they should not render homage unto him.

They illustrate their predicament by the story of a family occupying a hut near a field during the cultivating season. While the father and mother were absent at work, the children were terrified at home by a tiger that sprang from the bushes and made off with the sow. At nightfall the children told their parents what had happened. Before going into the field next morning, the father built a high platform of bamboos on which he placed the children and the motherless pigs, telling the children not to climb down during the day lest the tiger should again appear. The beast returned as expected and filled the air with its angry roaring, until the children threw down one of the pigs in the hope of quieting it. From time to time during the day its roaring was recompensed in the same manner, the children, meantime, watching the path with straining eyes for the return of their father and mother and listening intently for the sound of the bow-string which should tell them that an arrow was speeding on its way to put an end to the tiger. Thus "Y'wa" was apparently leaving the Karen people to their fate, while they were keeping on good terms with "Mü kaw li" by means of

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pagoda which should reach to heaven. When the pagoda was half built, God came down and confounded the speech of the people and they became scattered. The father of the Gelikho tribe was reputed to be "Than man rai," who came westward from the Red Karen country in which they had all previously dwelt, and with eight chiefs settled in the valley of the Sittang River. Dr. Francis Mason doubts the antiquity of this legend, for it certainly shows the marks of Hebrew influence. (Dr. Mason in *Journal, Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1868, Vol. XXXVII, p. 168).

[12] The above paraphrase is based on the translation of the legends by Dr. Mason as printed in the *Journal, Burma Research Society*, Vol. I, Pt. II, pp. 36, ff.

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773 776 offerings and ceremonies and were hoping for the return of the white brother with the Lost Book.

BELIEFS CONCERNING THE SOUL AND THE LIFE PRINCIPLE

774 761 The Karen distinguish between the "tha" or soul and the "k'la" or life principle (shade) of every human being. They think of the soul as the seat of their moral nature, endowed with conscience, that is, the power of apprehending right and wrong, and with a personality that persists after death. The soul is responsible and is judged for the acts in the flesh. The "k'la" is more intimately associated with one's physical existence. It is the force that keeps one alive and well. As it is being constantly solicited by demons and more or less by the "k'las" of dead relatives to leave the body, it needs the protection of charms, offerings, and medicines.[13] As the "k' la" comes from a previous existence to inhabit the body at the time of birth and departs into a new existence at death, so also it leaves the body for brief periods and at frequent intervals, as during sleep. If it remains away longer than usual, its absence causes the sickness and even the death of the body. As the "k' la" may be away visiting friends or on other errands during the sleeping hours, it is not safe to waken a sleeper suddenly. His "k' la" may not have yet returned, in which case he could not long survive. One Karen told me that he had dreamed of seeing various persons in heaven and hell and naively remarked that his "k' la" must have journeyed to those abodes during his sleep. Another Karen, whose wife underwent a surgical operation at a hospital in the city, asked me whether the ether cone was not used to extract and hold her "k' la," in order to render her unconscious, the "k' la" being restored to her to enable her to regain her faculties. The "k' las" of children are supposed to be peculiarly susceptible to being enticed away by those of the dead. Hence, it is customary to tie children up in the house while a corpse is being carried out. I have experienced considerable difficulty in inducing the inhabitants of outlying villages to let me take their pictures, for fear their "k' las" would be carried off along with the photo-

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[13] A full study of the Karen "k' la" and "tha" was made by the early missionaries to determine which of these two words should be used in translating the word, soul. "Tha" was the word finally chosen. The results of these studies are recorded, those of Dr. Wade, in *The Karen Thesaurus*, new ed., Vol. I, 442, ff, and those of Dr. Mason in the *Journal, Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XXX, Pt. II, 196, ff.

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orchard that was planted for them by the great and eternal God, "Y'wa." (See pp. 214-216.)

The divinity that presides over the cultivation of the paddy is known as "Hpi Bi Yaw." The legend relating to this goddess states that she and her spouse, in the form of pythons, slept on the paddy pile of a certain man and thereby caused the increase of his grain until it filled three bins, but that the ungrateful wretch killed the male serpent, bringing a curse upon himself as the result of which his supply gave out at the end of three months. In the attempt to buy enough grain to furnish food for his family he was reduced to poverty. After this "Hpi Bi Yaw" taught an orphan how to raise abundant crops in return for offerings which he made to her. As the other people were ignorant of what was expected of them, she first destroyed their crops and later caused their death, thereby instituting the custom of sacrifices in her honor.

Another legend in regard to "Hpi Bi Yaw" relates that in the guise of a dreadful old hag she begged men, who were seeking food in the jungle during a famine, to share with her. They refused; but an orphan, following in her path, took pity on her and was rewarded by being instructed in all the arts of raising paddy. Beginning with three kernels, which he took from the stomach of a dove, he grew both the early and the ordinary varieties of rice, as well as the glutinous rice. With a small knife given him by the goddess he was able to clear away the jungle-growth from his field at a stroke. Returning home with him, she directed him to boil a pot of water, and into it she shook an ample quantity of rice for the meal from her finger-tips. Through her favor his field surpassed all others in productivity and was cut by one sweep of the sickle. The grain was transferred from the field to its bin by magic, and, although stolen by the villagers, was restored by the goddess's dancing in the empty bin. During successive years she befriended the orphan and even dwelt in a hut in his field during the cultivating season, until he became prosperous enough to marry. The very next season, however, the orphan's wife became jealous of the goddess, came to the field, and beat her with a bamboo pole, until the divinity managed to escape from her assailant by changing herself into a cricket and hiding in a crab's burrow. "Hpi Bi Yaw" became so incensed at the outrageous treatment she had received that she has never returned since to aid any mortal; but

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offerings are made to her, and the rim of earth that encircles the entrance to crabs' burrows is placed on top of the paddy pile and in the bin in her honor.[1]

"Hkū Te" is the lord of the region of death, the king of hades. His origin is explained as follows: A couple dwelling in the spirit

A Bwe Karen Christian Village, Toungoo District
The Karen still love to build their houses as close together as possible.

realm once plotted to slay and devour their son-in-law. Accordingly, they turned themselves into giant winding creepers hanging across the road by which their intended victim was returning from his field, carrying a basket of paddy. Instead of attempting to pass under the vines, as he was expected to do, the son-in-law severed them with his sickle. One of the creepers, the wife, immediately flew upward to the sky and became a rainbow, while the other penetrated the earth, resumed his original form as a man, and became king of hades. There he receives the souls of mortals and rules over the dead. As judge of those under his authority he grants permission to the ones that have lived worthily to enter the higher realms, but he condemns to the lowest hell those of base lives. No offerings are made to this Karen Pluto.

[1] See ante, p. 62. An account of the ceremonies performed in connection with the cultivation of paddy complete pp. 54-62. The myth concerning "Hpi' Bi Yaw" resembles more or less that of the Irish and Scotch corn maidens, Kernaby, and suggests that of the Roman Ceres and the Greek Demeter: Sir J. G. Frazer, "The Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild," in The Golden Bough, Vols. VII and VIII.

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"Hkü Te" is to be seen as a rainbow in the west occasionally. At such times, according to one version of the legend, he is lowering a tube through which to drink the liquor provided at wedding-feasts. When a rainbow appears in the west early in the morning, the king of hades is again in the sky, this time setting up a funeral post ("t le") for his children.[6] From this it seems that he has had several offspring, but his wife has never borne him any since their son-in-law thwarted their plot against his life in the remote past. The funeral post is intended to remind men that many persons have died without receiving proper burial ceremonies. Such neglect entails some sort of a calamity. Hence, the Karen are stricken with terror when they observe the rainbow arching the western heavens early in the morning, especially if this sign is accompanied by thunder and earthquake. Under such circumstances they will not go to their work, for it is tabu.[7] If a Karen should point at such a rainbow, he would at once thrust his finger into his navel in order to avoid the loss of the offending member. This act is called "ugh de de."

The people say of the rainbow in the east that at the time "Teu Kweh," wife of "Hkü Te," became the bow of promise in the sky she was pregnant, and, being now separated from the earth, she is seen from time to time in the east going to draw water for herself. The souls of women who die with child are supposed to have no other means of obtaining drink, except from the rainbow divinity. When two rainbows appear in the east, the upper and larger one is her husband, who is visiting with her.

The second group of spirits among the Karen comprises those who have spent some time on earth as human beings, but have not gained entrance into the realm of the dead because they were denied funeral rites either on account of their bad character or on account of their having died by violence. Hence they are doomed to wander about, avenging themselves upon mortals. As they are supposed to be particularly occupied with this mission at nightfall, the Karen think it imprudent to be out during the early evening.

This division consists of three groups of beings. The first are "Th' re ta hka," or ghosts of those who have died violent deaths or have been carried off by epidemics of cholera, smallpox, etc. and could not, therefore, be given proper funeral ceremonies. They are believed to bring violent deaths and epidemics upon mortals, prob-

[6] See Chapter XX on Funeral Customs, p. 200.
[7] See Chapter XXVIII on Tabu, p. 289.

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776 older tribes in the country, but have become the common propert of the Karen for several generations back.

773 823 The Titan Atlas of the ancient Greeks, supporting a globe, ha his counterpart in "Hsi gu maw ya" or "Maw ya," as he is some times called. He is a brother of "Y'wa" and holds the world on h shoulders. When he grows weary, he shifts it from one side to th other and thus causes earthquakes. Sometimes the beetles that fee on the refuse of human beings report to him that they are starvin because there are no more people to supply them with food. Thi so angers him that he shakes himself and produces a series o earth-tremors. As these phenomena are common in Burma, th Karen seek to quiet them by shouting out: "We are still here. W are still here." Work is tabu during the day on which an earth quake occurs.[11]

776 821 The semiannual change of seasons can not but attract the at tention of the people living in Burma. For the Karen a company o demons, the "Law," is responsible for the wet season and anothe group, the "Hku de," for the dry season. The former, who ar sometimes named the "Law hpo" (signifying a company of them) are believed to have cities and dwellings in the upper region whence they regulate the rainfall and reveal themselves in th thunder and lightning. The flashes of lightning are nothing les than the flapping of their wings and the thunder is the rattle of thei flying shafts against their foes, the "Hku de."

824 776 231 The "Law" are also regarded as the source of the fructifyin power in all plants and trees that form their fruits in the we season. The grain is said to be conceiving when the kernels are de veloping, and the "Law hpo" are said to be the husbands who brin this about. Their function is to provide the plants, especially th paddy which is heading during the latter part of the rainy sea son, with the "sgheu" (the life-giving principle), that is, the va porous substance that comes from the land of the dead and revive all life on the earth.[12] The scarcity of domestic animals among th Karen is attributed to these demons, who are alleged to have raise such a stifling dust by shooting their shafts against the rocks tha the creatures took refuge in the jungle and became wild before the could be caught again.

821 776 The enemies of the "Law," the "Hku de," are also demons o the upper air with a human appearance, but no abiding-place. Dur

[11] See Chapter XXVIII on Tabu, p. 298.
[12] See Chapter XXI on Religious Conceptions, p. 222.

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ing the period when the "Law" are supreme, these divinities betake themselves to the clefts and fissures of the rocks on Mount "Thaw Thi"; but towards the end of the wet season they begin to gather their forces together for a mortal combat with their opponents. The flashing of spears is seen in the forked lightning, and the force of the blows exchanged is revealed in the roar of the thunder. The "Law hpo" are unable to hold out against the onslaught and withdraw for six months to the fissures and rifts in the rocks from which the "Hku de" came forth. A half-year later the "Law" will vanquish the present victors.

The "P'yo" are demons, usually in the form of dragons or serpents, that blow the water up from the ocean and produce the clouds from which the rain descends. They sometimes take on human form, and in this guise they figure in many Karen tales. They preside over the deep pools of streams, whose flow may otherwise be reduced to the merest trickle. The king of the crocodiles, "Maw law kwi," is said to be one of these demons.

Eclipses, like the clouds, are supposed to be caused by demons; but the eclipse-producing demons were once the dogs of a certain mythical personage who tried unsuccessfully to recover his stolen elixir of life from the moon. These dogs are "K' paw ta thu" and "T' hke mo bak." [13]

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There are other mythical beings of whom the Karen have more or less vague ideas, for example, the two daughters of "Y'wa" who came to earth in order to improve the condition of men. A prophet discovered their identity and urged the people to build a temple for their worship. The Pwo Karens not only failed to follow this advice, but also disregarded the proprieties so far as to begin pulling out their gold and silver hair ornaments. The goddesses became so disgusted with this rude treatment that they hastened back to their celestial abode, nevermore to be seen by mankind.

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A large group of malevolent beings, much feared by the Karen, are the "Ta na." These are witch-like in their operations, but possess the power to assume almost any form at will in order to harm mortals and are superhuman. They are not to be confused with the Burmese "nats," although they have certain resemblances to them.[14]

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[13] For the tale of the origin of eclipses see Chapter XI on Measures of Time and Space. Karen Astronomy, p. 59.

[14] See "Shwe Yoe" (Sir J. G. Scott), *The Burman, His Life and Notions*, Chap. XXII, pp. 294, ff.

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776 773 The origin of the "Ta na" is explained in two ways. According to one of these accounts, a basket containing all manner of living creatures was once set before the human race. The people were commanded to partake of them all, lest, if any were left, they might be themselves devoured by the survivors. But the "Ta na" clung so closely to the bottom of the basket that they were overlooked and have been able to terrify mortals ever since. The other explanation of the origin of these beings is that they were a sort of supernatural stomach belonging to certain persons and subsisting not on ordinary food, but on the "k'las" or spirits of human beings. The stomachs were capable of detaching themselves, in order to go in search of their special kind of nutriment. They may perhaps be compared to the old conception of the nightmare in English folklore, except that this demon confined its activities to the sleeping hours of the victim. The depredations of the horrible "Ta na" are related in many stories, of which the following may serve as an illustration:

A man was awakened one night by a figure, which he took to be that of his nephew in the act of massaging him. Next morning the nephew denied all knowledge of the incident and requested his uncle to strike him, if he was again detected in so strange a procedure. The next night there was a recurrence of the incident, but the uncle refrained from hitting his nephew, as he supposed the apparition to be. On the third night, however, he cut off the head of the troublesome visitor; and after dawn a headless corpse was found in the village, which the uncle regarded as proof that the "na" had assumed the form of his nephew in the effort to obtain his own shade ("k'la").

In another instance, one of the "Ta na" gave a slave girl the appearance of her mistress and *vice versa*. As a result of this exchange of characters the husband sent his wife into the fields to drive the birds from the standing grain. The wife, making friends with the birds, easily induced them to let the paddy alone; while she sent a dove to her mother to fetch some fragrant oil, by means of which she was at length restored to her own form and station.

One of the measures sometimes taken by a Karen to protect his field from the ravages of the birds, is to impale a tuft of grass on a sharp stick in token of the kind of treatment he declares himself to be visiting on the demon itself. The latter is thereby duly warned to stay away from the field.

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unwittingly rendering their offerings futile. The advantage of the village guest-room then became clear to me. There I and other strangers could be entertained, and there the men who were ineligible to attend the feast of the family they had married into could congregate and visit, while their relatives were participating in the "Bgha" ceremony.

The idea of sacrifice is undoubtedly at the root of the "Bgha" feasts. According to the explanation of an old Karen woman, when one has offended the family spirit or, as the people say, has "hit the 'Bgha'" ("pgha ba Bgha"), one has fallen on the worst possible fate; for the demon will seek to devour the life principle ("k' la") of the unfortunate one, unless propitiated by offerings of chicken and pork. The "Bgha" is supposed to be satisfied with the "k' la" of these sacrifices, which constitute the best eating within the knowledge of the Karen people. Even those who no longer fear their "Bgha" will call in the members of their family and make a feast, principally on account of their own enjoyment of it. In such cases they add the spices for a curry, instead of cooking the meat with only salt and chili. The Karen, especially those of Shwegyin, declare that fornication, adultery, and incest anger the family spirits more than any other offenses. Such acts of immorality incite the "Bgha" to curse the soil, blight the crops, and send epidemics among the people. Once aroused, a "Bgha" will assume the form of a tiger or snake and wait for its victims, in order to destroy the "k'las" of the offenders and other inhabitants of their village. In case of a poor season and bad crops the elders become suspicious and sometimes succeed in scaring young persons into a confession of their secret sins. Unusual offerings are required to appease the offended demon, these being—according to one list in my possession—first, a buffalo, next, an ox, and finally, a chicken and a pig. All the family must unite in an earnest prayer that these offerings may prove acceptable to the "Bgha" and avert any further calamities from them. The great fear of blighted crops, and of other evils not less feared because unknown, tends to keep the Karen a chaste people, which they certainly are for the most part.[2]

The traditional explanation of the use of the chicken bones and the pig's gall-bladder in divination, and of pork and fowls in the family feasts, is that the chickens and pigs ate most of the fragments of the God-given book which the white brother delivered to

[2] See pp. 30, 139, 142, 148, 192, 223, 288.

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the Karen back in the mythological age, and which the latter carelessly burned when he set fire to the brush that he had cut from his field. What offerings more acceptable to the "Bgha" could be made than the creatures that had absorbed the wisdom of the divine book?[1] That the pig is regarded as a vicarious sacrifice is shown by the rite in which the members of the family touch the side of the animal, while the "Lord of the spirits" is asked to protect them from sickness and sorrow. However, the Karen do not charge the pig with a message to the great spirit, as do the Kenyah and Kayan tribes of Borneo;[2] nor do they put their sins on the pig, as did the ancient Hebrews on the head of the sacrificial bullock or on the scapegoat.[3] In Toungoo the dog is substituted for the pig in the family rites, the tradition there being that it ate some of the fragments of the book of wisdom. The Rev. E. W. Blythe is authority for the statement that the cat is also offered to the "Bgha" in Toungoo.[4] The Bwe and Red Karen tribes, among whom the ox, buffalo, and goat are the common domestic animals, use one or another of these creatures, according to the manifestations obtained through divination.[5] I am told that in Shwegyin there are some localities where the people do not sacrifice animals of any kind, but make offerings of flowers only.

The leaves used in the feasts must be those of the wild plantain ("ya"), which is found everywhere in the jungle throughout Burma; for the tradition is that it was this variety of plantain which "Htaw Meh Pa," the mythical ancestor of the Karen race, cut off in blazing the trail for his people to follow on the way to a more fruitful land.[6]

The miniature house ("hi hpo kheh") is intended as a resting-place for the "Bgha," when it comes to enjoy the feast provided for it. This tiny structure is set in the inner room where the pig is killed, the sacrificial fireplace built, and the feast held. This fireplace is a sacred family altar apart from the place where the cooking is carried on daily. The inner room affords greater privacy to the family during the feasts. The Pwo Karen have special trays and dishes for their feasts, which are kept sacredly for this purpose.

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[1] Colonel A. R. MacMahon, *The Karens of the Gold Chersonese*, pp. 140, ff. For the story of the Lost Book see p. 233.

[2] Hose and MacDougall, *Pagan Tribes of Borneo*, Vol. II, pp. 60, ff.

[3] Leviticus, 16:21-23.

[4] Rev. E. W. Blythe in *The Rangoon Diocesan Quarterly*, 1917, p. 9.

[5] E. O'Riley in *Journal, Indian Archipelago*, 1856, p. 16.

[6] See *ante*, p. 5.

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CHAPTER XXV

MOUNT "THAW THI." RELIGIOUS CULTS

THE SACRED MOUNT

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In Karen lore mention is often made of the sacred mountain, "Thaw Thi," which was early thought to be identical with the fabulous sacred mountain of the Buddhists, "Myenmo Taung." When, however, Dr. Mason went to Toungoo, he found that "Thaw Thi" was the dominating peak of the range of hills separating the valley of the Sittang from that of the Salween—a peak evidently held in reverence by the Burmese who call it "Nattaung," that is, the mountain of the "nats" or demons. Of this range "Thaw Thi" is the most impressive peak, although it is a thousand feet lower than Mount "Pghaw Ghaw" four miles to the north, which rises to a height of 8,607 feet above sea-level and from which a wonderful view may be had over the surrounding hills. Of these two peaks "Thaw Thi" is thought to be the wife and the more important. Its summit is a wide clear space which, the people believe, is swept clean every morning by the goddess "Ta La," who has her abode there.[1]

Several traditions concerning the mountain suggest that it may have been a place of veneration of the people in its neighborhood. One story connects Mount "Thaw Thi" with the flood that submerged the world, except the ridge along the top "as much as a comb." [2] When the flood receded, the peacock pheasant ("pgho ghaw") alighted on the summit now bearing its name. Another legend represents "Thaw Thi" as being considered the highest mountain in the world, whose sides abound with all kinds of game, these creatures being constrained to render homage to this kingly mountain. Hence, all the beasts and the birds of the air, including the tiger, bear, crocodile, wild dog, dragon, vulture, and adjutant, ascend in procession to do reverence.

[1] See p 289.

[2] Dr. Mason, who is quoted in MacMahon's *The Karens of the Golden Chersonese*, 242. ff., is authority for this interpretation. A similar meaning was given me in Toungoo, but the spelling of the name of the bird and of the word meaning "as much as" differs a little from that commonly employed. These differences are probably due to local usage.

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Mount "Thaw Thi" also figures in some of the ancient folk-tales of the people. For example, one version of the story of the patriarch "Htaw Meh Pa" locates his home there. The den of the White Python is still pointed out on one side of the mount. It was to this den, according to the tale of "Ku Law Lay" and "Naw Mü E," that the fabulous serpent carried off the latter, whose husband dug holes there in trying to rescue her. These holes are also still shown.

When, in the middle of the nineteenth century, evangelists began to travel in the Toungoo district they discovered that the people living in the villages near Mount "Thaw Thi" indulged in various more or less elaborate rites on the peak. They had leaders or prophets in each village who interpreted the signs and set the time for the annual pilgrimage to the summit, where they sacrificed pigs and buffaloes, made offerings of wood and water, and built cairns of stones. A recent visitor to this spot reports that the cairns may still be seen, as also the broken pieces of the jars and bottles which once held the offerings; but that the paths are now overgrown, inasmuch as the former ceremonies have been long discontinued. Only a few old men recollect the pilgrimages to the summit made in their boyhood days. Some of these say that the people ascended the mountain to await there the appearance of the god, "Y'wa," in order that they might commune with him;[1] while others connect these rites with the Karen goddess, "Ta La," who they say dwelt there and must be propitiated at her own shrine. That "Y'wa" was venerated on the mountain is confirmed by the following poem, which Dr. Mason found in Tavoy, more than three hundred miles from "Thaw Thi" itself:

"'Y'wa' will come and bring the great 'Thaw Thi'.
We must worship, both great and small,
The great 'Thaw Thi', created by 'Y'wa'.
Let us ascend and worship.
There is a great mountain in the ford.
Can you ascend and worship 'Y'wa'?
There is a great mountain in the way.
Can you go up and commune with 'Y'wa'?
You call yourselves the sons of 'Y'wa'.
How often have you ascended to worship him?
You claim to be the children of 'Y'wa'.
How many times have you gone up to worship 'Y'wa'?"

That so conspicuous a peak as Mount "Thaw Thi" should have been regarded as the abiding-place of the great god, "Y'wa," and

[1] Rev. E. W. Blythe, of Toungoo, in *The Rangoon Diocesan Magazine*, (1917) Vol. XXI, No. 11, pp. 96, ff.

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CHAPTER XXVII

DIVINATIONS

Recourse is had to the bones of the fowl for prognosticating the future throughout many parts of southeastern Asia. In these regions the chicken is indigenous, and it may be that the custom of examining their bones came about in a natural way, as suggested by Sir J. G. Scott.[1] It would be natural for people entering a new country for the purpose of settling in it to take note of all indications as to its fertility, including the size and condition of the fowls. Perhaps this gives us the clue to the origin of the Karen practice of inspecting the holes of the thigh-bones of the fowl. The words designating this usage are "ka hsaw ki," which literally mean to break the fowl's bones. It may be that originally they actually broke the bones and examined their structure, strength, and condition to determine whether the fowls were well nourished or not, and that later the custom arose of inspecting only the holes in the bones. Why such a change should have taken place is without explanation, unless the people thought they had discovered a relation between the general healthiness of the bones and the pinholes along their sides.

The Karen people themselves connect the origin of this custom with the legends of their early golden age, before they had lost their book or "Mü kaw li" (Satan) had tempted their ancestors to disobey the eternal God, "Y'wa," and had then taught them divination. The story of the Lost Book is found among other peoples in this region of the earth and in brief is as follows: In the beginning "Y'wa" had seven sons, the eldest of whom was the Karen and the youngest, the white man. The father, being about to go on a journey, invited the Karen to accompany him; but the latter declined on the score that he had his field to clear. The Burman also refused to go. However, each of them gave "Y'wa" a gift, the Karen presenting him with a bamboo trough, such as the pigs feed out of, and the Burman, with a paddle.[2] The white brother was induced to accompany his father,

[1] Sir J. G. Scott, *Burma, A Handbook*, 399, ff.

[2] Another version of this myth says that the Karen gave "Y'wa" a "saw ku" or rain cover such as is worn when the people are transplanting rice in the rainy season.

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and, when they got to the sea, they transformed the trough into a boat and the paddle into a mast and sail. By these means they soon reached the celestial shore. While there "Y'wa" prepared three books: one of silver and gold for the Karen, because he was the oldest; one of palm-leaf for the Burman, and one of parchment for their white brother. These were given to the white man, and he accepted them, but kept the silver and gold book himself, sending the parchment book to the Karen by the hands of the Burman. The Karen was busy clearing his fields and, paying little attention to the book, forgot to carry it home. When he burned off his clearing, it was lying on a stump and was nearly destroyed. The pigs and chickens ate the charred remains of it.[3] Thus, the wisdom contained in the book, which the ancestors of the race sorely needed after sickness and trouble came upon them, was nowhere to be found except in the pigs, chickens, and charcoal, and it was to these they turned in their distress. According to the account contained in the "Y'wa" legend, the serpent, "Mü kaw li," was directly responsible for leading them to these sources of wisdom.[4] Such is the mythical story of the origin of divination among the Karen.

If one asks Karens versed in the old poems, why the people consult these omens, they are apt to answer by quoting the following lines:

"The book of the ages was rooted by the pigs.
At first the women neglected it.
The men also did not look at it.
If both men and women had studied it,
All the world would have been happy."

"Our book of gold that "Y'wa" gave,
Our book of silver that he gave,
The elders did not obey.
Lost, it wandered to the foreigner."

Among the forms of divination the one most in vogue is that of examining the chicken bones. It is used on all occasions. Nothing is undertaken by those retaining the old superstitions, whether of little consequence or great importance to them, without divination,

[3] There are two accounts of the loss of the book, which are about equally common. Besides the version which says that the book was left on the stump, is another relating that the book was left on the floor, near the entrance to the house. Here it lay unheeded, till at last it fell through the cracks and was picked at by the fowls and chewed by the pigs under the house, being finally entirely destroyed. Then, at last, the unhappy people began to feel the need of its guidance.

[4] See Chapter XXI on Religious Conceptions, p. 213.

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cribe the portent to some angry demon, who may at any moment impose a worse calamity upon them if they fail to observe this warning. The tabu of labor, until their fears have subsided, is clearly the precept that would suggest itself to people of deep-seated superstitions. According to Karen legend, the dogs that cause the eclipse of the moon by eating that luminary, are colder than water; while the one that swallows the sun, is hotter than fire. In order to prevent excessive heat or cold and the sickness and death that would follow, the people must abstain from work on the days when an eclipse occurs. The Karen name for the tabu of the eclipse is "ta dü ta yu mü ta yu la." [7]

The portent of the earthquake is produced by the mythical giant, "Hsi Ghu," when the beetle that feeds on the refuse of human beings, tries to deceive him into believing that the human race has disappeared from the earth. In his wrath the giant shifts the planet from one shoulder to the other, and the people shout to him in consternation: "We are still here. We are still here." When, in times past, the giant caught the beetle in this trick, he struck it in the face, and the beetle has had a flat nose ever since. At the time of an earthquake the people refrain from their work for a day, in order to help restore the equilibrum of the planet and to mollify "Hsi Ghu." This practice is called the tabu of the earthquake or "ta dü haw hko hu." [8]

When the apes howl it is a portent that the goddess "Ta La." who dwells on Mount "Thaw Thi," [9] one of the higher peaks of the mountain range separating the Toungoo district from Karenni, is uttering curses, which are greatly feared. In Shwegyin the people ascribe the falling of the leaves in the latter part of February to her imprecations and refrain from work for three days. They believe that if they failed to observe this "ta dü hpa taw" (the long tabu), their crops would be ruined.

The portent of strange sounds in the jungle betokens a combat between two celestial beings, one of whom, "Kwe De," hurls his spear at the other. The whizz of the weapon as it speeds through the air and its thud on striking the ground, evoke the cry, "Htaw law," from those who hear these startling sounds. They must stay at home that day, lest they should be in danger from these mythical spears.

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[7] See Chapter VII, p. 54.
[8] See Chapter XXII, p. 230.
[9] See Chapter XXV, p. 262.